

**WASHINGTON WEEKLY REPORT  
FEBRUARY 17 – FEBRUARY 21, 2014**

**(The following is an overview of D.C. activities concerning Miami-Dade County, the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, the County's Congressional Delegation & the Administration)**

*THE SENATE WAS NOT IN SESSION*

*THE HOUSE WAS NOT IN SESSION*

**MIAMI-DADE COUNTY'S CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION WEIGHS IN ON THE SITUATION IN VENEZUELA**

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Chairman of the Middle East and North Africa Subcommittee, sent the following letter to Secretary of State John Kerry asking to reduce by at least 10% the oil imports from Venezuela and to direct the Permanent U.S. Representative at the Organization of American State (OAS) to call for a special session to discuss the ongoing Venezuelan crisis.

The Honorable John F. Kerry  
Secretary of State  
United States Department of State  
2201 C Street  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I would like to respectfully request that the United States government immediately reduce by at least 10% our oil imports from Venezuela and direct our Permanent U.S. Representative to the Organization of American States (OAS) to call for the Permanent Council to convene a special session of the General Assembly to debate the crisis in Venezuela.

The ongoing conflict in Venezuela has led to the deaths of young students with scores injured as its people call for democratic reforms and freedom. In return, the Venezuelan leader has responded by: declaring three U.S. consular affairs personnel as personae non gratae and giving them 48 hours to leave the country, restricting the Venezuelan people's access to social media such as Twitter, censoring the press, violating human rights by detaining and intimidating students, and arresting the leader of the peaceful opposition, Leopoldo Lopez.

It is regrettable that in 2012, Venezuela was still the fourth largest foreign supplier of crude oil to the United States even though oil imports from Venezuela have been declining. In 2012, the U.S. imported less barrels of total crude oil

than in 2005 and this downward trend should continue. According to statistics from the Department of Commerce, Venezuela's oil exports to the United States were valued at almost \$31 billion in 2013, accounting for 97% of Venezuela's exports to the United States. In 2011, the state-owned Venezuelan oil company Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) was sanctioned by the U.S. government for delivering two cargoes of reformato to Iran, worth approximately \$50 million. The United States should not help maintain a regime that undermines our national security and violates human rights.

Regarding the OAS, I firmly believe that the U.S. should take the lead in bringing Venezuela's crisis to the fore at this multilateral entity. The OAS has proven that it lacks the inherent ability or political will to properly address regional threats to democracy. As a founder and the largest international donor to the OAS, the U.S. has a responsibility and moral obligation to ensure that democratic principles are upheld and hold accountable those leaders who infringe on the fundamental freedoms of their people. Article 20 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter specifically states that "if the urgency of the situation so warrants, the Permanent Council shall immediately convene a special session of the General Assembly." In addition, the people of Venezuela deserve an opportunity to present their claims in front of the inter-American system in keeping with Article 8 of the Charter which states, "Any person or group of persons who consider that their human rights have been violated may present claims or petitions to the inter-American system for the promotion and protection of human rights in accordance with its established procedures."

It is worth noting that we are not alone in this matter and have received regional support calling for peace in Venezuela. For example, former President of Colombia Alvaro Uribe and former Peruvian President Alejandro Toledo have asked for solidarity with the Venezuelan people during their struggle. In addition, the former judge of the Inter-American Human Rights Court, Asdrubal Aguiar, has called for the Permanent Council at the OAS to convene.

Mr. Secretary, we must stand in solidarity with those freedom fighters in Venezuela that are being persecuted. Due to the actions taken by the Venezuelan regime that violate democratic order, the U.S. must not stay silent and should therefore immediately reduce oil imports from Venezuela by at least 10%. In addition, our Permanent Representative at the OAS should urgently use the voice, vote, and influence of the United States to help convene a special session to examine the current violence and crisis in Venezuela.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen  
Chairman Emeritus

The Congresswoman made the following statement after sending the letter to the Secretary:

*"With the ongoing conflict in Venezuela and countless human rights violations occurring, I have asked the Obama administration to reduce its oil imports from Venezuela to send a signal of support to those being oppressed by the Maduro regime.*

*"I also urge responsible nations throughout the Western Hemisphere to hear the calls for democracy coming from the streets of Venezuela and abide by the principles instilled in the Inter-American Democratic Charter by convening a special session at the OAS to discuss the escalating conflict.*

*"I commend the students and their supporters for courageously speaking out against the Maduro regime that seeks to undermine democracy and violate human rights."*

Also, on Thursday, Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart and Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen held a press conference with members of the Venezuelan community in solidarity with the people of Venezuela and against the violent aggression of Venezuelan government.

Congressman Mario Diaz-Balart released the following statement on the reports of violent aggression towards protesters by the Venezuelan government:

*"Today, the people of Venezuela have been protesting the corruption, food shortages, soaring crime rates and unemployment, and the alarming erosion of human rights and civil society. Regrettably, Maduro's thugs have countered these brave protesters with violence and imprisonment, leaving some seriously injured or dead.*

*"I urge the international community to affirm its commitment to the basic freedoms that are under brutal assault in Venezuela, and to stand with the Venezuelan people who are demanding democratic institutions free from corruption, and who are asserting their right to live free from oppression."*

Senator Marco Rubio also issued the following statement regarding the ongoing crisis in Venezuela:

*"The situation in Venezuela is growing more violent and deadly, as innocent Venezuelans demanding their freedoms and greater accountability from the government are being met with government-organized armed repression and violence.*

*"I am sickened by the images I've seen of young people being maimed, jailed and even killed by Nicolás Maduro's thugs. The world is watching, and every government-backed thug thinking about carrying out orders against innocent*

*Venezuelans should really think about the eventual consequences that will come with their actions. There are cameras everywhere, and they will be held accountable for following the orders of an increasingly illegitimate government that's proving it can only remain in power through repression and violence.*

*"America should not stand idly as Venezuela's government tramples on the Inter-American Democratic Charter that all nations in our hemisphere, except Cuba, have endorsed. I am troubled about the failure of other democratically elected governments in Latin America to publicly stand by the mass peaceful demonstrations of students and other civilians and against Maduro's government's brutal repression of the marchers.*

*"As pro-democracy leader Leopoldo Lopez sits in jail, we should demand his immediate and unconditional release, along with others who have been unjustly imprisoned for demonstrating against the Venezuelan government. We should demand that the government refrain from attacking its opponents.*

*"The Administration should use every diplomatic means necessary to draw attention to the courageous efforts of Venezuelans, the cowardice of Maduro's government, and impose sanctions on those planning and actively participating in repressive and violent acts.*

*"I'm glad President Obama finally spoke about the situation yesterday, and he should take concrete actions that make clear we stand for peace in Venezuela and against a government that represses its people. He should make clear his support for the Global Human Rights Act, which awaits for Congress' approval and would provide his administration with additional means to combat gross human rights violations like what we've seen in Venezuela.*

*"I am proud to represent a state where thousands have worked tirelessly to raise awareness about the situation in Venezuela and be a voice to the world for those who Nicolás Maduro's government seeks to silence. With several peaceful demonstrations planned across Florida this weekend, I stand in solidarity with those efforts and with the courageous people in Venezuela who want a better future for themselves and their country."*

## **REP. GARCIA HOSTS TELE-TOWN HALL TO DISCUSS FLOOD INSURANCE ISSUE**

On Tuesday evening, Congressman Joe Garcia hosted a Tele Town Hall to discuss national flood insurance reform. The hour long live event attracted over 3,900 callers from Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties concerned about their rising insurance rates and desperate for relief.

"Why doesn't anyone care about what is happening to us?" asked one caller as she desperately questioned her steep and unsustainable rate increases.

“I care. I care deeply and I’m very concerned”, Congressman Garcia responded. “That is why I called tonight’s Tele Town Hall. We are facing a crisis here in South Florida, and across the country, and it is well beyond time we found a fix”.

Last month, Congressman Garcia introduced the HOME ACT of 2014 – bipartisan legislation aimed at addressing the harmful effects of Biggert-Waters by delaying skyrocketing flood insurance rates, demanding FEMA conduct an affordability study, and creating a long-term solution by emphasizing the importance of mitigation.

While the Biggert-Waters Act of 2012 attempted to address FEMA’s \$24 billion of collective debt, it inadvertently placed harsh and unconscionable financial burdens on home and small business owners – some so severe they were forced to move from their properties.

“Part of the concept of a national flood insurance program is that we’re all in this together” Garcia said when describing the unfair share South Floridian’s are being asked to pay.

According to a poll taken during the call, over 60% of callers were directly impacted by Biggert-Waters, seeing their rates increase drastically.

Last week, House Majority Leader Eric Cantor said the House can expect to see a bill come to the floor for a vote soon. Congressman Garcia pledged to stay vigilant to ensure any bill introduced is comprehensive enough to bring real relief to every family and policyholder.

Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz also weighed in on the issue recently, delivering the following remarks on the House floor:

*“Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of homeowners in South Florida and around the nation trying to maintain affordable flood insurance coverage; and I urge you to bring the Homeowner Flood Insurance Affordability Act to a vote today.*

*Through the National Flood Insurance Program, millions of homeowners benefit from the ability to purchase affordable coverage, including thousands of South Florida families.*

*While I understand the need to keep the national program financially stable, we must do so while ensuring that these families can afford the coverage on their homes.*

*Surging premiums destabilize our recovering housing market and cause uncertainty for homeowners. The system cannot withstand these increases, and we must act to fix it.*

*I thank my colleagues in the Senate who passed this bill, and my colleagues on both sides of the aisle who make up the 200 bipartisan cosponsors here in the House who want to pass this bill into law.*

*Mr. Speaker, our nation's homeowners can't afford to wait any longer. We need to vote on this bipartisan agreement today.*

*Thank you, and I yield back the balance of my time."*

## **HOUSE HEARING NEXT WEEK ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING PREVENTION; LEGISLATION INTRODUCED IN CONGRESS & BCC PASSES RESOLUTION**

Next Wednesday, the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Subcommittee of House Appropriations Committee will hold an oversight hearing on the state of efforts to stop human trafficking.

Also, introduced last week was The *Preventing Sex Trafficking and Improving Opportunities for Youth in Foster Care Act* which would require states to take steps to identify, prevent, and address sex trafficking of youth in foster care.

This comes on the heels of the Miami-Dade County Commission approving a resolution on Wednesday sponsored by Commissioner Jose "Pepe" Diaz urging Congress to pass the "Strengthening the Child Welfare Response to Human Trafficking" bill sponsored by Sen. Marco Rubio. The legislation would require the development of national rules and guidelines to better track and serve child trafficking victims, including those in foster care.

"We need to take steps to protect these most vulnerable young victims from this most heinous of crimes, and I urge Congress to take action as soon as possible," said Commissioner Diaz.

Commissioner Diaz has been a staunch advocate of tougher laws to prevent and break up sex trafficking rings in South Florida. In 2012, he sponsored legislation urging the State Legislature to toughen penalties on those convicted of human and sex trafficking. At the local level, Commissioner Diaz spearheaded a training program, which also included a Public Service Announcement, at both Miami International Airport and PortMiami for employees to identify and respond to suspected victims of trafficking.

OIA and the Federal contract lobbyists will report on the hearing and continue to update the county on the legislation's progress.

## **OIA ATTENDS SPEECH BY UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE FROMAN**

On Tuesday, OIA was in attendance for a speech by United States Trade Representative Michael Froman at the Center for American Progress. The discussion with the Ambassador included the values and priorities that drive the Obama Administration's approach to trade policy. In his remarks, Ambassador Froman addressed the economic impact of trade agreements, the trade negotiating process, as well as what America's workers and the world stand to gain in the Administration's fight to raise labor and environmental standards in trade agreements.

For a fact sheet on the issues mentioned in the speech please use the following link: [Fact Sheet](#)

## **SEN. RUBIO TO DELIVER REMARKS AT INAUGURATION OF CUBAN MEMORIAL MONUMENT IN MIAMI**

On Saturday, February 22, Senator Marco Rubio will deliver remarks at a Miami event inaugurating the Cuban Memorial Monument on Florida International University south campus grounds.

Rubio's remarks will honor the victims of the Castro regime in Cuba and highlight the challenges facing today's pro-democracy advocates on the island.

Rubio will also make an aggressive defense of global human rights as a priority objective of U.S. foreign policy, as despotic governments commit heinous crimes against people in Cuba as well as Venezuela, Ukraine and North Korea, among other places.

## **FIRST LADY TO VISIT MIAMI NEXT WEEK TO CELEBRATE THE FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF "LET'S MOVE!" INITIATIVE**

This week, First Lady Michelle Obama kicked off a celebration around the fourth anniversary of *Let's Move!*, her initiative to ensure that all children grow up healthy and reach their full potential. On this anniversary, Mrs. Obama will be highlighting examples of people, communities, and organizations that are participating in this movement.

According to a White House press release, on Tuesday, February 25th, following a *Let's Move!* School Wellness Event in Washington, the First Lady will travel to Miami, Florida. While in Miami, she will visit a local parks and recreation center to make a major announcement about healthy out-of-school time.

Following her event in Miami, the First Lady will join Mario Lopez for an interview for Extra. Later that afternoon, the First Lady will join Satcha Pretto for an interview with *¡Despierta América!*

Mrs. Obama launched *Let's Move!* on February 9, 2010 to unite the country around kids' health and create real support for families to live healthier lives. Since then, parents, business leaders, educators, elected officials, military leaders, chefs, physicians,

athletes, childcare providers, community and faith leaders, and kids themselves have stepped up to improve the health of the nation's children.

More Americans now have access to healthy, affordable food closer to home, school health environments are changing, healthier foods are being marketed to kids, and making healthy choices is becoming easier for families. A CDC report released last year showed that obesity among low-income pre-schoolers declined in 19 states over the past couple of years.

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

*February 24 – February 28, 2014:*

- The House will be in session
- The Senate will be in session

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